

*'We do not believe that humanity is destined to forever play out the old patterns and themes of discord and strife. We see our human family poised on the threshold of a new consciousness. Old paradigms based on struggle, greed, power and fear must end. Educational, social, political and religious institutions will make the leaps that reflect humanity's awakening, or they will dissolve to make way for new systems.'*<sup>1</sup>

It is only recently that the international community has begun to recognise that women, as survivors of violent conflict, also bear the burden of reconstruction in the transition period.<sup>2</sup> They are largely unseen and unacknowledged, instigators of peace.<sup>3</sup> In the Pacific region, women have had a vital role in peacemaking although they have rarely been consulted or included in formal peace talks.<sup>4</sup> Feminist voices for peace are needed if women in every culture who struggle for liberation and social justice are to be supported.

### **Women's Voices**

Women's voices are needed to identify and address the root causes of war; voices that promote the inseparability of 'peace' from justice, including economic justice; and voices that show that real security is possible when we weave a new global web of mutual aid and support.<sup>5</sup>

*'The education and empowerment of women throughout the world cannot fail to result in a more caring, tolerant, just and peaceful life for all.'*<sup>6</sup>

It is civilians, not soldiers, who suffer the largest number of casualties – and war, racism and poverty impact deeply on women. When they act, it is not just to make a case for victimhood, but to offer a different vision of strength where the values of life and caring are defended.<sup>7</sup>

It is necessary to analyse patriarchy which makes up those values, ideas and beliefs that reinforces male dominance over women.<sup>8</sup>

It comes down to a way of thinking that leads to a way of seeing reality. Patriarchy – imperial thinking - is often associated with aggression and competition, qualities assigned to men. It devalues the roles of nurturing, service and care mostly assigned to women. So it is the hard over the soft; the tough over the tender; punishment, vengeance and vindictiveness over compassion, negotiation, and reconciliation. It promotes power, success and masculinity and denigrates weakness, powerlessness, and femininity are denigrated. It considers cooperation, negotiation, compassion and recognition of mutual interdependence as womanly weakness whereas force, punishment and violence are considered the answer to conflict and social problems and ultimately expressed in who has the largest collection of 'phallic projectile weapons'.<sup>9</sup>

Women prevent the threads of life from being broken. The greatest minds have always understood the peacemaking role of women.<sup>10</sup>

### **History**

Women have always had a role in prevention conflict, protesting war and part of the resolution of war and conflict. In times past women have even been known to withhold conjugal rights from their men to stop them from fighting.

‘Feminism's agenda is basic: It asks that women not be forced to choose between public justice and private happiness.’<sup>11</sup>

In recent times, the first time in history, at the International Congress for Women in April 1915 at The Hague in the Netherlands, 1,200 women from warring and neutral countries protested against World War I. This later became the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). It was the beginning of women's organisations and movements in support of peace and disarmament.

During the Cold War, women lobbied against arms stockpiling and the possible use of nuclear weapons. In 1959 the European Movement of Women Against Nuclear Disarmament and other women's groups began massive education and petition campaigns. In 1961, WILPF pioneered the US/Soviet women's seminars to help break Cold War barriers. In 1964, Women Strike for Peace was started in America while women from all over the world converged on a NATO conference in the Netherlands to oppose plans to establish a multilateral nuclear force. In 1969, WILPF sponsored an international conference on ending chemical and biological warfare. In the 1980s, the women of Greenham Common in England inspired the world by their opposition to nuclear weapons and bases.

As men had always done to leave home to fight wars, these women left their homes to dedicate themselves to peace. In the 1990's, mothers in both Macedonia and Chechnya continued the peace movement. In 1999, the Million Mom March in the USA dedicated itself to the prevention of gun deaths and injuries and supported victims and survivors of gun violence.

In May 1982, *Grandmothers for Peace*, a non-profit organization, was formed at the height of the Cold War. The ‘grandmother effect’ operates among Israeli soldiers who control Palestinian movements. They are part of MACHSOM Watch founded in 2001.<sup>12</sup> In the Pacific region, women have organised against nuclear testing. In Japan, women set up a peace camp at the base of Mount Fuji. In Angola, Burundi, Kenya, Somalia and Niger women have advocated for peace and reconstruction in their countries, and in Bougainville women were instrumental in bringing the violent conflict to an end. There are many other organisations, such as *Women in Black* and *CodePink*, that also work to prevent violence and struggle for peace and reconciliation.

### **Why women in peacemaking?**

A compelling factor in the mobilisation of women to form their own peace organizations is that of ‘mothering’. There is also the fact that their security is also threatened. Women have always organised themselves to protect their children: the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina protested the ‘disappearances’ of their children during the reign of a tyrannical military dictatorship; the *Meira Paibis* challenged the proliferation of armed conflict in the northeastern region of Manipur in India; the *Association of War Affected Women* (AWAW) who were directly and indirectly affected by the war where their sons and husbands were either missing/missing in action, killed, or disabled due to the conflict in Sri Lanka.<sup>13</sup>

‘My humanity is bound up in yours, for we can only be human together’.<sup>14</sup>

A key factor is the connection many women have made between gender equality and peace where permanent peace could be built only on the basis of equal rights (including equal rights between women and men), justice within and between national independence and freedom. The various forms of violence - such as human rights violations, violence against women, and structural violence in economic disparities – have been linked to the violence seen during wars. From this perspective, disarmament relates not only to all forms of violence but also to the creation of a culture of peace, which can be perpetuated just as easily from generation to generation.<sup>15</sup>

The security implications for women are considerable, even though they are not comparable to those faced by men in battle. Wherever weapons exist in communities, and are not removed following a conflict, women risk not only lethal domestic violence, but become more vulnerable as they manage their daily workload and face the burden of caring for the injured and disabled.<sup>16</sup> The link between the gender division of labour and organised violence in non-industrialised societies strongly suggests that there may be a close connection between modern forms of male domination over women and modern war.<sup>17</sup>

According to the United Nations, a culture of peace is ‘a set of values, attitudes, traditions and modes of behaviour and ways of life that rejects violence and prevents conflicts by tackling their root causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation among individuals, groups and nations’. This is the context in which women as sisters, wives, mothers and transmitters of cultural values, especially children and youth, have played a major role in cultivating a culture of peace.<sup>18</sup>

‘If it's natural to kill, how come men have to go into training to learn how?’<sup>19</sup>

**End-notes follow:-**

- <sup>1</sup> Lotus Linton Howard, *The Grandmothers Manifesto*, [http://www.awakenedwoman.com/grandmothers\\_manifesto.htm](http://www.awakenedwoman.com/grandmothers_manifesto.htm)
- <sup>2</sup> Conaway, Camille Pampell, *The Role of Women in Stabilization and Reconstruction*, ***Stabilization and Reconstruction Series*** No. 3, August 2006.
- <sup>3</sup> Thomas, Pamela, *Conflict and Peacemaking: Gender perceptions*, Development Studies Network, Australian National University.
- <sup>4</sup> Thomas, Pamela, *Conflict and Peacemaking: Gender perceptions*, Development Studies Network, Australian National University.
- <sup>5</sup> Starhawk, *Why We Need Women's Actions and Feminist Voices for Peace*, <http://www.starhawk.org> January 6th, 2003
- <sup>6</sup> Aung San Suu Kyi (1945 - ), Burmese-Myanmarese dissident and politician; Leader of National League for Democracy, Nobel Peace Prize laureate
- <sup>7</sup> Binalakshmi Nepram Mentschel, *Paying Homage to Women's Roles in Peace and Disarmament*, [The Women's International Perspective](#) May 26, 2008.
- <sup>8</sup> Starhawk, *op.cit.* cf. also Brian Martin, *Uprooting War* (London: Freedom Press, 1984, revised 1990). Chapter on 'Patriarchy'; this is the revised 1990 version.
- <sup>9</sup> Starhawk, *op.cit.*
- <sup>10</sup> Mikhail Gorbachev, former president of USSR
- <sup>11</sup> Susan Faludi (1959 - ), US feminist and Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist
- <sup>12</sup> O'Loughlin, *Mothers of convention break down the barriers*, ***Sydney Morning Herald***, June 11, 2005.
- <sup>13</sup> Binalakshmi Nepram Mentschel, *Paying Homage to Women's Roles in Peace and Disarmament*, [The Women's International Perspective](#) May 26, 2008
- <sup>14</sup> Desmond Tutu (1931 - ), South African archbishop, civil rights defender, Nobel Peace Prize laureate
- <sup>15</sup> Binalakshmi Nepram Mentschel, *op.cit.*
- <sup>16</sup> Binalakshmi Nepram Mentschel, *op.cit.*
- <sup>17</sup> Brian Martin, *Uprooting War* (London: Freedom Press, 1984, revised 1990)
- <sup>18</sup> Cheng, Quek Geok, *Ordinary Women, Extraordinary Qualities – Women as Role Models in Peace Efforts*, University Women Association of Singapore, 2006.
- <sup>19</sup> Joan Baez, (1941 - ), US folk singer/song writer, peace activist

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